

MAUDE MAY BABCOCK

i 1867-1954

i Educator, Director

i 1ST Female Department Chair at the University of Utah

Maude May was a wonderful visionary and facilitator of the regional theater movement. She produced and directed over 300 stage productions. She taught elocution at the University of Utah where she was paid \$500 per year. She was the first female department chair at the University. In 1930 Maud May received her own university theater where she produced and directed shows starring Broadway performers such as Otis Skinner and the first on-stage Peter Pan, Maude Adams.

Maud May was an early lobbyist for the woman's vote and "wanted to improve their health, improve their looks." She moved to Utah in 1892 after being convinced by Women's Rights advocate, Susa Young Gates. It was once said of them, "They were two soulmates of high purpose."

Maud May graduated from the National School of Oratory of Philadelphia and the Lyceum School of Acting. She worked under the Shakespearean scholar, Alfred Ayres. She studied at Chicago University and in London and Paris before receiving a Bachelors of Arts from Wells College in New York City.

Maude May was the founder of the College of Physical Education and two departments at the University of Utah. In 1897, she organized the University Dramatics Club which was the most consistent and prolific of its kind in the nation. By 1913 the club consisted of students, alumni and professors.

In the classroom and rehearsals Maud May was ruthless. She would verbally criticize her students and punctuate her words by a pointed finger. Utah governor, Herbert Maw, was one of her students & credited her with "encouraging him to find confidence in public." Maud May cast the shy Herbert in the role of Theseus in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. He went through weeks of tortured rehearsal, but learned to walk around campus "like an Athenian king." Not everyone appreciated her bullish style. One faculty member, Harold Goff, lasted only four years before saying that Maud May's "excess of enthusiasm" was among reasons for his resignation. Upon hearing this, Maud May went to confront him. Goff later admitted that she had won the argument.

Two years before Maud May retired, her former students gathered for an anniversary production of *Mrs. Bumpstead Leigh*, originally directed by Maud May in 1913. They formed a Reading Society and christened the student stage at the University's Pioneer Memorial Theatre the Babcock Theatre in her honor. She retired in 1938 at the age of seventy one and was said to have given the longest active service of any faculty member — forty six years.

Maude May passed away in 1954 at the age of eighty seven. She left behind a great theater legacy.